

ngūria waraka nīkī ndakwīra,  
wīnyegenyūre eee,  
nayo nyibe-  
ya mīromo ndakwīra wīnyegenyūre

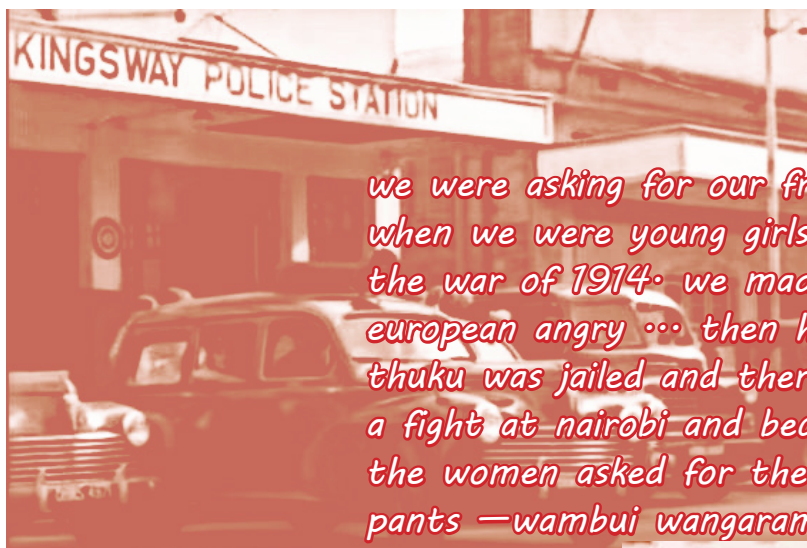
ngūria ndīthiaga naū ndakwīra,  
wīnyegenyūre eee,  
ka ariugaga,  
nīararumwo ndakwīra wīnyegenyūre

# K A N Y E G E N Y Ū R I

rīrīa mūkwaba mītego ndamwīra,  
mwīmenyerere eee,  
mūtikagwatie-  
wī ndūgū ndamwīra mwīmenyerere

būrūri ūyū nī mūrītū ndakwīra  
wīmenyerere eee  
ūkuagwo-  
na mūhoto wa ūritu rwa ūhatika





*we were asking for our freedom  
when we were young girls during  
the war of 1914. we made the  
european angry ... then harry  
thuku was jailed and there was  
a fight at nairobi and because  
the women asked for the men's  
pants —wambui wangarama<sup>11</sup>*

15<sup>th</sup> March 1922:

a group of women  
gather in the dark  
by the river, not far from  
the jail. friends, neighbours,  
mothers, sisters, daughters,  
sex workers, landlords, beer  
brewers, maids. against  
custom, they swear an oath  
that enjoins their resistance

## Native Agitator Arrested

HARRY THUKU TAKEN IN  
CHARGE BY SPECIAL  
WARRANT.

PRINTING WORKS RAIDED

Late on Tuesday afternoon an  
affidavit was received at the police  
station.



to the East African Association. whatever it takes, sexual violence and slavery will be abolished. wages will be fair. land + cattle will be returned to Africans. Harry Thuku will be free. We will be free. mwana wa ngatha nĩ mwega, ndakwira wĩnyegenyũre!

When people went and were put in jail, that is when Muthoni and her counterparts thought of going to the jail [...] There is nothing else that happened because they had gone, they were naked, they were just shot. They were seeing those were policemen who were refusing them to go. But the women wanted to show that they were able because this country was theirs and they were not afraid.  
—ruth wangari wa thung'u<sup>[ii]</sup>



*Zafrania Faraj was born around 1910 in Mji wa Mombasa, the illegitimate daughter of a Kipsigis prostitute. Both she and her mother were converted to Islam by Faraj, a Nubian. Zafrania's mother was so successful that she was able to build a house in Pumwani and to buy four others—two in Mombasa and two in Kericho. Zafrania inherited all these on her mother's death*

## **THEY TAUGHT US HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER AS KENYANS**

*by k'eguro*

By 1911 Nairobi had approximately 10,000 black residents, with about 8,000 men and 1,300 women, the rest being children.<sup>[iii]</sup> Urban-based women sold petty goods and provided intimate services—including cooking meals and washing clothing—to men of all races and ethnicities. Because these women lived without the protec-



tions of husbands and fathers and brothers, and provided a range of intimate services, they were described as urban prostitutes. Today we would call them sex workers.

Historical studies by Janet Bujra and Luise White have demonstrated the central role sex workers in Nairobi played in creating important networks of affiliation that re-defined gender relations, ethnic alliances, and kinship formations. <sup>[iv]</sup> For instance, older urban women would choose younger women who were not blood relatives as their heirs. As they did so, they transformed the relationship between property ownership and kinship. First, they demonstrated that it was possible for women to leave their property to other women, challenging the patriarchal illusion that men are the only ones who can own and distribute wealth. Second, by choosing to share their goods with women who were not blood relatives, urban sex workers helped create practices of Kenyan-ness that were based on respecting and valuing non-blood



relatives. Indeed, these early sex workers model for us how to live together in a multi-ethnic and multi-racial Kenya where we value strangers and friends as much as we do family.

As urban sex workers interacted with a range of men of various ethnicities and races, they created important paradigms for how Kenyans can live together in practical and intimate ways. These communities of women practiced forms of intimate hospitality that can teach us how to share intimate spaces—our homes, our public spaces, our regional homelands. Such sharing is always a risk, of course. It is dangerous to open our homes and hearts and to share our bodies with each other in intimate spaces; but it's even more dangerous to close ourselves in within high walls of ethnicity and gender and religion and sexuality and class.

Perhaps most significantly, Nairobi's early sex workers teach us that, in Lauren Berlant's words, "intimacy builds worlds." While it would be easy to dismiss these



women as only working within confined spaces, it's more accurate to claim that they built strong networks of support and care among themselves and also created strong public foundations for cross-class, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial coalitions. These women, our mothers, taught us how to live together as Kenyans.

[i] Interview with Cora Ann Presley, "Labour Unrest Among Kikuyu Women in Colonial Kenya"

[ii] First Woman interview in Leigh Brownhill, *Land, Food, Freedom: Struggles for the Gendered Commons in Kenya, 1870-2007*

[iii] Political Record Book Nairobi District, 1910-1914, PC/CP.1/8/1, KNA. I offer conservative approximates. The records distinguish between Somalis, Native Africans, Alien Africans, and "Miscellaneous." I give figures for Native Africans. The 1911 census is the first that breaks down population by gender.

[iv] Janet M. Bujra, "Women 'Entrepreneurs' of Early Nairobi," and Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*

\*\*\**compiled and designed by nd00ta. extra special thanks to nish of [flood tide zines](#) for being my research partner and translator*\*\*\*



# SEX WORKERS IN KENYAN LITERATURE



In the making of the post-independence city, many Kenyan writers perpetuated colonial tropes of the sex worker: an irredeemable biological and social ill and/or a victim to be saved from drudgery. Some writers, however, took a different approach: what happens when sex workers tell their own stories?





In my country, a malaya cannot go home. [...] And will they not say you are spoiled? You have had other men, European men and circumcised men of other communities. You have got used to other ways of living. Will you go to one of your round villages and hoe and bring water with your hair all shaggy?

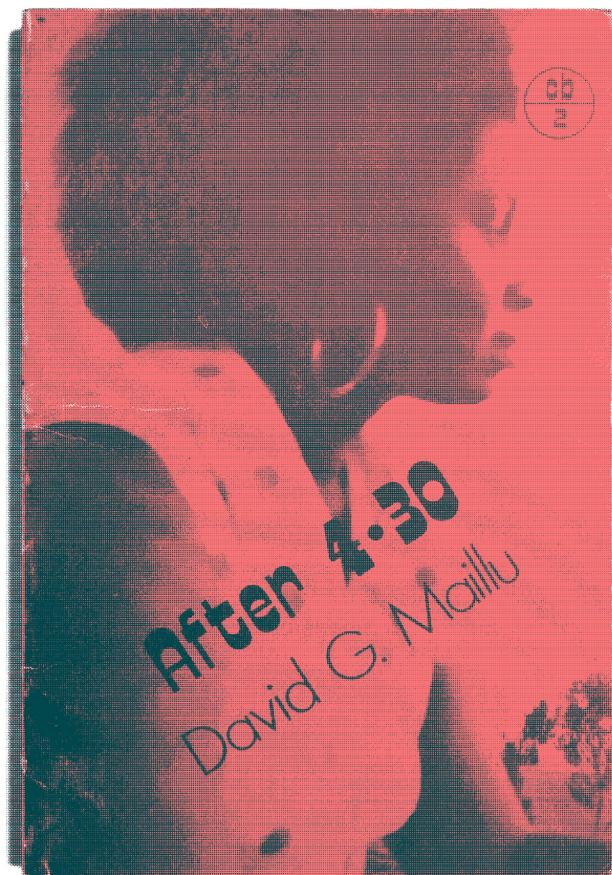


Will you go as a fourth wife to another old man, you who sit poring over a newspaper as though you can read it? Will you make do with millet porridge in the good season and pounded cassava in the dry season? And when your old man dies, will you be able to tear your clothes off and weep upon his body, showing that you have done him no wrong? And if you cannot, what will they do to you?

Well, if they threaten to send me out of town, I pay them, that's all. You won't starve. You've got a good head, you know. Maybe you could even learn to read. They won't let you live like a whole woman but perhaps you learn to live like half a man. But don't say I made you. I gave you food and a place to rest, that's all. You did the rest yourself. (27)



why must men always sit there making law  
for the woman?



do they know what it is to be a woman?

to hell with these philosophies/  
and man's law/that ignore the  
existence of woman.(20)

justina - family from mombasa, nai-  
robi railway workers, father a polyg-  
amous train driver in the last days  
of the steam engines, justina growing  
up contented in the city with assort-  
ed brothers and sisters, then a series  
of misfortunes that devastated, deci-  
mated, and dispersed the family. dis-  
ease. job loss. death. dropping out of





school to take care of her sick mother, who had been the youngest and later abandoned wife. Justina's little joys: timing the mombasa-nairobi train as it chugged along the railroad close to her shack, running after it and listening for the sound of its horn.(199)

"a prostitute's child needs the same things other babies have." (197)





# This is for My Auntie Penzi Who—

Idza Luhumyo

I want to be like my Auntie Penzi whose smile now glints because of the gold in her teeth, and who, despite dropping out of Ribe Girls in form two, still found a way to pay the rent for our house in flat A, and who always

dressed as she pleased, and who loved whoever she pleased, and who grew black dreadlocks on her head, and who did not bother taking her husband to the village for the dowry negotiations, and who, when the wedding came, extended an invite to every family member but me and my mother.



I love watching movies, especially Italian movies because I love Italian men. I like intellectual movies too and I love cartoons because they make me laugh. I am a fun-loving person and I am a very good mother. I dedicate my time to children at an orphanage where I volunteer, and I dream of one day having an orphanage for AIDS orphans.

So when people ask me who I am, I tell them that I am many things - I'm a mother, a sister, a daughter, a friend, a woman, an activist, and so much more. Yes, I am a sex worker, but that is not who I am, it is just what I do.  
(80)

*"When I dare  
to be powerful..."*



*On the Road to a Sexual Rights  
Movement in East Africa*



Akina Mama wa Afrika



# SEX WORKERS AND THE MEDIA

GroundUp

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## Nairobi sex workers want a research code of conduct

They have been inspired by example of South African San groups

10 April 2017 | By Melanie Gosling

Nairobi sex workers, who made headlines in the early 1990s when researchers announced that a small group appeared to be immune to HIV, want to establish a code of conduct for researchers in an attempt to get some benefit from the decades of studies they have taken part in.

They also want some sort of “meaningful involvement” in the research.

Their idea was born in Cape Town during a conference in March, when a group of Nairobi sex worker delegates watched three South African San groups launch a code of ethics for researchers, intended to encourage the kind of study that was to the mutual benefit of both the San and researchers.



# Women in prostitution protest

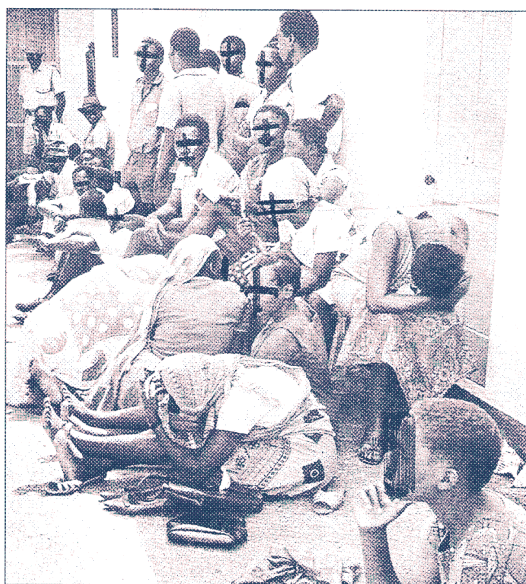
■ July 4

**M**ore than 500 women mobbed the Mombasa Kanu provincial headquarters today to protest the Government's policy against what they termed as "mass arrests of innocent women in the town".

Led by Halima Mwalimu and Mama Asina, the women spoke to Ronald Ngala, vice-president of Kanu Mombasa, about the problem that they believe had been caused by the Government's bungled bid to eradicate prostitution. They asked him to deliver their protest to the President.

A Nairobi City Council report released in May cited Mombasa as having one of the highest rates of prostitution in Kenya. Nairobi has also been suffering similar problems and the council had been asked to do a survey of Kenyan towns. The women urged the Government not to victimise women as a whole but to come up with measures that will also affect men. They claim that innocent women are being hauled off to prison when they have done nothing. Mwalimu, chairman of the Bajuni women's wing, had herself been arrested in similar circumstances by an over zealous policeman.

Mama Asina said: "We are being subjected to gross embarrassment by a few women who litter the town's streets for the purpose of prostitution." Ngala had earlier said: "Prostitution is against our policy of African Socialism where young men and women should be brought up to respect themselves." Present laws permit any "common prostitute" to be sent to jail for three months if found guilty and for a year for subsequent offences. The law does not explain the parameters of common prostitution.



The city council's by-laws in Mombasa authorise its askaris to arrest women under its "general nuisance" ordinance for loitering, soliciting and importuning. It is this law that the Mombasa protestors believe hurts innocent victims, because the "common prostitute" is singled out and arrested without warrant, apart from the evidence of the police. They also leave the woman's partner to go free.

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH:** Mombasa women stormed the local Kanu offices to protest against arbitrary arrests on allegations of prostitution.

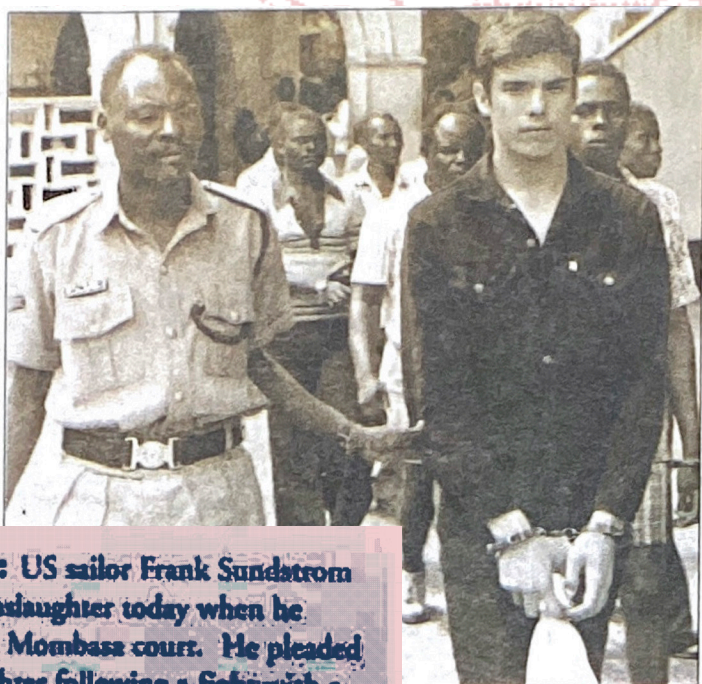


they don't really care about public interest; they are more invested in what is of interest to the public [...] if this sounds like this will sell, that is what they're going to write. if you write an article in this way, and you submit it to your editor, in as much as you want it to sound good, your editor might refuse, so you have to write it in a way they like it so it can be published.

every time media houses call me, it's because they have an issue or a story [...] this is why i've come to realise you have to come to terms with my conditions before we start the interview, otherwise nitakaibisha huko mbele. stop asking me if i go to church – yes i do go, what else do you want to know? i don't pay the ksh, 310 for god to give me sijui nini, no i don't do that stuff. ask me about my kids, yes, i have kids, i'm proud, i'm a mother. as much as i'm a sex worker, ask me about married life. that's why you find at some point, you find yourself asking the interviewer, “are you married? do you have kids? did you ever get a favour at ktn, maybe to get a promotion?” because it's a live show, they'll now feel embarrassed and change the questions. for me i don't believe in this singling out nonsense. ‘cause there was a time they were asking me, “so now because you're a sex worker...” nikamwambia



“i think every womxn is a sex worker including you.” it was a live show. i was asking her, “now coz you work at ktn, don’t you think if you do some sex favours you’ll get promotions and stuff?” she was shocked. —wangari



**September 30:** US sailor Frank Sundstrom got away with manslaughter today when he walked free from a Mombasa court. He pleaded guilty to manslaughter following a fight with a Mombasa prostitute in which he killed her with a broken bottle.



# Puzzle of unsolved murders of sex workers in Nairobi

Monday, May 14, 2018 — updated on June 28, 2020



Human rights activists and sex workers demonstrate in Mombasa last year in April demanding justice for their colleague, who was murdered in a lodging. PHOTO | FILE | NATION MEDIA GROUP



## Kenyan sex workers demand recognition of their rights amid violence and murder

As the 2012 murder of Agnes Wanjiru captures global attention, Kenyan sex workers renew calls for decriminalisation of their work



## PRESS RELEASE ON K24's FEATURE, BWETA LA UHALIFU: NDOA HADAA -

July 9, 2013

We, the undersigned, having noted with concern, the recent feature story by K24 TV's Bweta La Uhalifu: Ndoa Hadaa, aired on Monday and Tuesday, July 8-9, 2013, at prime time, where they showed various sex work hotspots in Nairobi's CBD, and having exposed the faces of some of the female sex workers and their clients, including their lodgings, wish to condemn the blatant exposure of the persons featured in this documentary by K24 and general content and messaging of the feature.

We note:

- The disregard by the journalists and producers by showing, on live television, the faces of women who sell sex thereby exposing them to risk such as beatings, rejection, shame and discrimination.
- The use of tricks by the show's producers to blackmail and entice the sex workers into giving their personal stories and using hidden cameras, to capture faces and locations, is also suspect and in clear violation of journalism ethics and practices.



- The decision to show public exposure by some of the sex workers on live television was demeaning and dangerous to young persons who watch the show.

As the sex worker movement, we thus:

- Would like to say that the sex workers exposed in the documentary were mothers, parents, sisters and aunts, grandmothers and therefore if their identities are not protected, their lives are in danger and at risk in the community and their family members.

- Note that the documentary demeaned the women featured by not only exposing their faces and profession, but by asking degrading personal and sexual questions.

- Wish to inform you that due to recent media reports, we have experienced several killings and attacks from unknown persons against sex workers, both male and female and transgender. The media has a role to play in shaping how society treats its minorities and if not reported in a balanced, respectful and ethical way, are liable to attacks and other risks.

We demand that:

- K24 remove further publishing of the documentary publicly and on social media and YouTube to further stop the damage done.



- K24 issues an apology and retraction of the documentary to stop further public humiliation and stirring hate among Kenyans.

We would like to reiterate that sex workers rights must be respected at all times. Further, we call on the media and the Government to concentrate on more pressing social issues such as poverty, education, rising insecurities, food and others. What two consenting adults do in their own privacy harms no one.

Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (KESWA)

HOYMAS-Kenya

Bar Hostess and Empowerment Programme  
(BHESP)

Identity Kenya,

African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA)

Waremba Sasa

Bar Owners Group,

Chaani PTC,

Arise & Shine,

Night Nurse,

Shooting Stars,

Bentrose Group,

Changamka Self Help Group,

HAPA Kenya and all sex workers activists, individuals, organizations

Contacts: 0717662915 / keswa04@gmail.com



M

Marie-  
to me,

Jul 24, 2020



Dear W<sup>h</sup>

I am writing concerning your text on Nairobi's sex workers based on the workshop you organized some time ago. I perused it very carefully (and added some comments - see attachment), knowing also that you had already reworked it based on some earlier comments sent to you, but we won't be able to publish it. The theme of sex workers is absolutely relevant and it is undeniably urgent to address it, but the text itself is not academic enough for  as a research and academic institution. The academic literature is vast on this theme and you do not refer to it - yet this literature would have been very useful to interrogate more in-depth the link between collective morality and state repression, as well as to shed light on the construction of life trajectories in ways that go beyond assertions about whether it is "a choice" or not to become a sex worker. The methodology upon which the text relies helps to provide some insightful life testimonies but they are not sufficient to finely explore the links between the sex work, discrimination and state control.

We do hope you will find other spaces of publication for a text that remains very informative and can appeal to many readers.

Regards,



**DECRIMINALIZATION**

**IS THE  
ONLY  
SOLUTION**



## **THE PENAL CODE CAP.63 OF 2009**

- Detention of females for immoral purposes (Section 151)
- Male person living on the earnings of prostitution or soliciting (Section 153)
- Woman living on earnings of prostitution or aiding, abetting or compelling an individual to engage in sex work (Section 154)
- Procedure for entry and search of premises used for prostitution - (Section 155)
- Running a brothel (Section 156)
- Unnatural offences (Section 162)
- Indecent practices between males (Section 164)

## **SEXUAL OFFENCES ACT NO. 3 OF 2006**

- Exploitation of prostitution (Section 17)
- Deliberate transmission of HIV or any other life threatening sexually transmitted disease. (Section 26)



## PUBLIC HEALTH ACT CAP 242

“Certain provisions have been used to compel forced medical examination including the enforcement of forced HIV testing of sex workers. Sections 43 & 44 make it mandatory for any person suffering from any venereal disease to consult a medical practitioner and be treated until completely cured and criminalizes non-compliance. Sections 27 & 28 touch on TB treatment, care and prevention, which is an issue that greatly affects people living with HIV. It gives the public health officer the authority to isolate persons who have been exposed to infection or may be in the incubation stage of an infectious disease. The two sections have been used to unconstitutionally incarcerate TB patients for “failure to adhere” to treatment.” – KESWA (2018)



## Should we legalise prostitution?

Saturday, September 02, 2023 — updated on September 09, 2023

## Prostitution: Should we legalise it?

I have learned a lot of difficult lessons through my work with our organization. Although we are a women's empowerment organization, we have faced a lot of stigma from the women's movement. They invite us to meetings but they don't want our issues to feature prominently. Even when our issues are discussed in these meetings, they are almost never included in the meeting reports. Many of these organizations do not really take us seriously, so you wonder why they bother inviting us. We are never asked to speak in plenary or make presentations. They probably just invite us so that they can report to their donors that they 'included' the sex worker constituency. Many of the women in the women's movement are married, are Christian and bring conservative views to the women's movement. Human rights should not be about morality though. At our organization, we stand for human rights for everyone, "Rights here, right now!" — Susan



“A city plan is to construct a narrative view of history as a march in one direction; towards an inevitable progressed end point.”

—Jepkorir Rose, *Untitled*

“But we had already seen how landlords and self-employed women kept Nairobi orderly for years.”

– Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*

# wanakuboeke philharmonic

1899: Nairobi,  
a pause along a growing railroad on the way to  
Somewhere Else

1899: Nairobi,  
panga<sup>3</sup>/ˈmæŋgə/kt/weka vitu kwa utaratibu mzuri/  
Pangani/one of the first African settlements/  
arrange<sup>3</sup>/əˈreɪn(d)ɜ/verb/adapt (a musical composition) for  
performance with instruments or voices other than those originally  
specified  
Pangani/the order of sanctuary and heartbreak  
The city un-plan

**NB:** While national legislative documents outline instruments of criminalization directly related to sex work and errant or queer sexualities, county by-laws receive significantly lesser media coverage and policy attention because they are not explicitly connected. In Nairobi county, for example, sex workers are often harrassed or criminalised by police and county askaris and consequently charged under general nuisance offences, including public indecency, public disturbances.



## **"AREN'T WE ALSO WOMEN?"**

KENYA SEX WORKERS' SHADOW REPORT SUBMISSION TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF  
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN 68th SESSION

GENEVA 2017



Kenya Sex Worker Alliance (KESWA)

Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Program (BHESP)

Phelister Abdallah

Lucy Maina

Josephine Mtende

Peninah Mwangi

October 2017

“We recommend Kenya decriminalize sex work and all related activities as necessary measure to guarantee sex workers’ right to work in our chosen occupation, to safe labor practices, and a safer working environment with less or no violence.” (13)

“The laws in Kenya makes every aspect sex work a crime and a punishable offence, criminalization of sex work reduces freedom of sex workers to even negotiate for condom use with client.” —Peninah



“hizi meno nilitolewa na polisi. kwa sababu ya nini? sitoangi dora ya stool. siwezi toa dora na nauza kuma kwa mlango yangu, kwa nyumba yangu, natoa dora ya nini na sikuangi na bar? ukweli. dora yagu ni rent yangu. hapa ni kwan-gu. hizi meno nilitolewa na polisi, si na bwana ama mwanaume nilimwibia. ben teke. sirudi kuli-panga dora. nikamuuliza, “mwili wangu ndiyo nauza, nyumba ni yangu nailipia, we nakulipa? [...] security gani? saa hile usiku me nikidinya kirai, na mtu anatoka anaenda, ye huwa?” hiyo ndio kitu nilimuuliza. saa hile usiku, mtu ana-gongea, anaingia, ananidinya na anatoka, siwezi mfuata, nyumba zetu ni za chochoro. nikimfuate aniumize? nafunga tu mlango naacha aende. wewe huanga wapi? juu kwamba si mara moja hii mwezi nimedinywa sare; nimedinywa karibu mara nne. hapo ndio alinigonga hivi. hatukuan-ga na ma-lawyers, nilijaribu kufuata kesi human right – wamefagilia mpaka wa leo. miaka ngapi? nne, me ni mapengo. [...] na namjua, ata yeye hunipitanga mimi hivi kama mboga. ni mtoto wangu alikuwa kwa bar anakunywa hapa, ame-kaa hapa. halafu pia, angalia security yangu. mimi naishi shauri moyo, yeye ni polisi wa shau-ri moyo, hataniua?” — katherine



“I would like to see an East African sex worker movement. There is all this talk of sex worker rights and decriminalization, but one country cannot do it alone.

When sex workers in Uganda talk about how the government is tough on them, we the Kenyan sex workers feel fortunate that we have a bit more freedom, but we don't want sex workers in one country to be more oppressed than in any other country. We need to speak as one voice in the three countries and fight for the same rights. If we are just sex worker groups in different countries shouting, no one will take us seriously. But if we are a movement, we will truly be a force to reckon with.”—Daughtie